WE ARE WITH JESUS

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Category: Observations

I've recently been musing on Jesus transfiguration for a sermon, which for one reason or another, I never got to preach. As I looked at the passage, I was struck by something that I'd never really noticed before.

The transfiguration occurs at a crucial point in the Gospel narratives. Peter has just acknowledged Jesus as Messiah and Jesus has announced to his followers that he will soon be killed. The tensions which have been building up in the narrative are about to come to a head. At this point, the Father meets Jesus on a mountain top and declares:

> *This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy. Listen to him.*
>
> *Matthew 17:5, 6*

This must have been incredibly comforting to Jesus as he geared up to face the horrors of the crucifixion. To add to this, Moses and Elijah appeared with him - the law and the prophets personified - showing that Jesus was right in the centre of the Father's purposes for Israel. For a young Jewish man, soaked in the Old Testament, this would mean more than we could ever imagine.

So at this crucial juncture, the Father comforts and encourages the Son. We get a little glimpse into the divine life of the Triune God.

Meanwhile, Peter starts worrying about building shelters, for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Most commentators and preachers say something about the inappropriateness of Peter's response. Having spent a fair bit of time on mountain tops, I'd be inclined to cut him a bit of slack - they can be uncomfortable places. However, what really strikes me is that Peter, James and John were there in the first place.

The scene is one of sacred solemnity, as God's purposes for Israel are coming to a climax in Jesus. God the Father commends God the Son in the presence of Moses and Elijah - what were three fishermen even doing there?

Then again, we see a similar, but even more poignant scene in the Garden with Gethsemane. The Son pours our his heart to the Father, asking for the cup to be taken from him and who is present (if

asleep)? The same three disciples, Peter, James and John.

We rightly stress the promises in Scripture that Jesus will be with us. These are especially important at times like this when everything seems to be so fragile. However, I believe that the reverse image of this is also important. Not only is Jesus with us, but we are with him. At key points in his life on earth, he sought out the company of his disciples and friends. The Incarnate Son did not need human company, but he wanted it.

And he still does...

When Jesus is building his church around the world, he does it through human beings. When he reaches out to the hurt and suffering in the world, he does so through us. There is no doubt that Jesus could do all of this on his own, or he could send armies of angels to sort the world out, but he doesn't. The Jesus who wanted his friends with him at the transfiguration and at Gethsemane wants his friends by his side as he builds his worldwide community.

Yes, he is with us during the coronavirus outbreak, but as he reaches out to a sad and scared world, we are with him, too. I think this is remarkable.